

WHITTIER'S EARLIEST POEMS.

1825 — 1826.

NEVER BEFORE PRINTED.

In the last year of his life, Mr. Whittier gave me, as a specimen of his hand-writing when a boy, a foolscap sheet, containing these two poems. Both were written before he had enjoyed any educational advantage other than the district school, and before anything of his had ever appeared in print. There can be no doubt that one reason why he never gave these lines to the printer was that his Quaker conscience was awakened to the fact that both poems were eulogies of warriors.

S. T. P.

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LAFAYETTE.

[The last stanza of this ode appears in facsimile in the "Life and Letters of Whittier," page 546, but no other part of it was ever printed. It was written during the last visit of Lafayette to this country, when Whittier was seventeen years of age, and it is the earliest poem extant in the author's handwriting. S. T. P.]

The battle thunders loudly pealed,
The appalling scenes of war begun
And many an hero took the field
Led by the dauntless Washington.
And when proud foes our land assailed,
When hostile fleets our shores beset,
Then with what joy the patriots hailed
The youthful soldier, Lafayette.

Forever be thy name revered,
Thou who for us so much hast done,
When thou thy service volunteered,
In Freedom's cause, with Washington.
Unmatched in strife, in might arrayed,
Thou wast where fierce combatants met,
Where shrinking foes gave way dismayed
Before the approach of Lafayette.

Full many of them who with thee led
The veteran bands of freedom on
To war, are with the silent dead
Like Putnam, Stark and Washington.
And thou art left—far be the day
When thy resplendent star shall set,
And millions their last tribute pay
To Freedom's friend—to Lafayette.

But when at last death shrouds thy frame—
Thy well-spent life serenely done—
The world shall then enroll thy name
On glory's list, with Washington.
Fair Freedom, then, shall o'er thy tomb
Shed tears of deep and sad regret
Whilst in perennial beauties bloom
The immortal part of Lafayette.

LINES ON THE DEATH OF ALEXANDER I.,
EMPEROR OF RUSSIA.

[This eulogy of Alexander I. was written by Whittier three months after the death of that monarch, and is to be found in no collection of his works. This is the Czar who abolished serfdom in the Baltic Provinces, and encouraged the introduction of Western civilization in his empire. His part in curbing the ambition of Napoleon was probably uppermost in the Quaker boy's mind when he wrote these lines, which were never in print until they appeared in "The Independent," Dec. 7, 1905. S. T. P.]

The pride of the North to the tomb has descended,
The glory of Russia has sunk in decay;
For departed is he whose dominion extended
O'er Tartar and Cossack with absolute sway!

Cold and still is the heart of the princely commander,
The star of his glory is set in death's gloom;
The clods of the valley enshroud Alexander,
And Azof's tide washes the base of his tomb!

As a tyrant and despot the world may upbraid him,
And vilely with infamy his memory brand,
Unlike to the time when with awe it surveyed him,
The wonder of Europe, the pride of his land.

But look to the records of grandeur and glory
Of absolute monarch and despotic chief.
How few can be found within history's story
More worthy than he of the tribute of grief?

Long ages may pass, and the distant sun fling out
Its cold beams on many an Emperor's tomb,
And the bells of St. Peterburg merrily ring out
A welcome to others to rise in their room;

And there may not be found when the long record closes,
Of those who have sat upon Russia's high throne,
A prince more deserving than he who reposes
Where Azof's tide washes his monument stone!